

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 3341

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, UR, US
SUBJECT: ARBATOV ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS

1. DURING CONVERSATION AT SPASO HOUSE SOCIAL FUNCTION LAST WEEK, USA INSTITUTE DIRECTOR ARABTOV EXPRESSED TO AMBASSADOR HIS DEEP CONCERN OVER IMPACT OF THE CURRENT DEBATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP. ARABATOV STATED THAT WHAT WAS MOST DISTURBING WAS THE CONCLUSION DRAWN THAT THE U.S. HAS MOUNTED A "CONCERTED CAMPAIGN" AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION. WHEN AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THERE IS NO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION, BUT INCREASED ATTENTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, ARBATOV REPLIED THAT HIS "HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS" ARE FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT THE U.S. HAS MOUNTED A DELIBERATE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE USSR. HE THEN ADDED THAT, IN LIGHT OF THIS, SECRETARY VANCE "WILL NEED TO BRING MORE TO MOSCOW IN HIS BAGS" THAN WOULD HAVE BEEN NECESSARY OTHERWISE.

2. ARBATOV AND HIS DEPUTY BOGDANOV ALSO DWELLED ON THE THEME OF THE "CONCERTED CAMPAIGN" WITH OTHER EMBASSY OFFICERS PRESENT. WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE FACT THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS SPOKEN OUT ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES
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IN MANY COUNTRIES, THEIR RETORTS CENTERED ON VOA RUSSIAN BROADCASTS AS THE CLINCHING EVIDENCE FOR THEIR ASSERTION. IN ARBATOV'S WORDS, VOA "HAS BEEN GUILTY OF THE WORST EXCESSES" BY REPORTING "CONSTANTLY" ON THE SOVIET INTERNAL AFFAIRS. BOGDANOV WENT ON AT GREATER LENGTH IN THIS VEIN, AND REMARKED THAT IT IS DIFFICULT ENOUGH TO INTERPRET THE UNITED STATES THESE DAYS WITHOUT ALSO TRYING TO

INTERPRET WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS VOA'S "NEW ATTITUDES AND EMPHASES". BOGDANOV ADDED THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THE INTERNAL USG DEBATE REGARDING THE DEGREE OF GUIDANCE APPROPRIATE FOR VOA, BUT CONCLUDED THAT SOVIET ANALYSTS HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO CONSIDER VOA AS THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE USG, AND THEREFORE ITS CHANGE IN TONE AS THE RESULT OF OFFICIAL GUIDANCE.

3. COMMENT: WHILE ARBATOV AND COLLEAGUES HAVE AN OBVIOUS INTEREST IN ENCOURAGING A "MODERATE" VOA APPROACH TO THE USSR, THEIR COMMENTS ON THE SOVIET PERCEPTION OF VOA'S RUSSIAN SERVICE SEEM TO US NOT ONLY PLAUSIBLE, BUT HIGHLY LIKELY. VOA'S TONE AND APPROACH HAVE CHANGED NOTICEABLY IN RECENT WEEKS, AND WE HAVE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT GUIDELINES PREVIOUSLY IN FORCE HAVE BEEN IGNORED WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY. THIS DOUBTLESS PROVIDES POWERFUL "CONFIRMING EVIDENCE" TO THOSE SOVIET OFFICIALS INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION'S ATTENTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IS IN FACT LITTLE MORE THAN THE PRETEXT FOR A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE USSR, THE REAL REASON FOR WHICH THEY ARE UNABLE TO FATHOM.

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